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SUBJECT: INSIDE MFA: PARTY HACKS AND VIEWS ON BILATERAL
RELATIONS

REF: ADDIS 257

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) In a private February 10 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief, a long-term Foreign Ministry (MFA) official lamented that the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has begun stacking government offices with newly-recruited party members through the on-going Business Practices Re-engineering (BPR) process. The source confirmed previous reports from MFA counterparts that the Ministry has brought on 230 new "trainees" to bolster the Ministry's capacity per BPR recommendations. Of the 230 new-hires, all are party officials, with roughly 160 of them coming from middle-management positions in Ethiopia's regional governments. Unlike current MFA employees, all of these new-hires have received Ministry-provided housing and salaries at levels double the prevailing rates of current MFA officers. The source noted that the expectation from Ministry leaders is for these new staff members to assume middle- to senior-level positions (possibly to include Director General level positions) in MFA and Ethiopian embassies upon completion of their one-year training programs.

12. (S/NF) The source reported that the ruling party recognized that the Ethiopian military and security service was most loyal to the party in the 2005 national elections, but that the civil service was a potential vulnerability. The source confirmed other reports that since 2005 the military and security services had been purged of individuals and ethnicities perceived not to be loyal to the ruling party, but argued that the civil service throughout the executive branch of Ethiopian Government (GoE) has seen a similar purging. The source reported that since 2005 the MFA has introduced a four-point grading system for employees. Individuals who are members of the ruling party and fully support the party are given an "A" grade. Those perceived to be loyal to the party and its platform, though not necessarily party members, are given a "B" grade. Both A's and B's are considered for promotion. Those who are not party members, or who are apolitical, are given a "C" grade, are subjected to increased observation, and are not considered for promotion regardless of any positive performance. Those perceived to oppose the ruling party or its platform are given a "D" grade, are terminated from the GoE, and generally subjected to observation by the security services. The source reported that he has repeatedly been approached by superiors and encouraged to join the ruling party. The source has similarly been approached by colleagues and pressured to contribute financially to the ruling party's NGOs. He attributes his refusal of such overtures to his being frozen in his position for years.

13. (S/NF) The source noted that while the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Africa's tough message to the GoE in late-January (reftel) initially got people's attention, it was brushed aside as bluster almost immediately by the MFA and ruling party. The source argued that MFA officials fundamentally believe that the United States assesses that it (the U.S.) has too many interests at stake in the Horn of Africa to risk a cooling of relations by pressing for political reforms. He argued that public statements in 2005 and 2006 by U.S. Chiefs of Mission in Ethiopia made clear to the Ethiopian people that the USG has picked allied itself with the GoE. He argued that while the USG may have had influence over the GoE to induce positive reform up until, and soon after, the 2005 elections, it has lost all such influence since then. He argued that the ruling party views its narrowing of political space since 2005 as critical to its continued existence in the face of the threat from the opposition and civil society. As such, if faced with the dilemma of whether to make reforms under international pressure and risk being toppled or forego strong external relations to survive, the GoE will certainly choose the latter option.

COMMENT

14. (S/NF) While the source's comments are not surprising, they do offer a deeper and closer glimpse of the extent to which the EPRDF is so fundamentally dominating the stage for the 2010 elections. His insights on bilateral relations

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suggest that the U.S. Administration's new tone of diplomatic engagement will fail if not accompanied by clear and bold actions. At the same time, his warning is prescient in noting that in pushing the GoE for reforms -- through dialogue and action -- we must remain mindful to explain our common stability objectives clearly to the GoE and EPRDF and to avoid over-reaching for too drastic of reforms lest the ruling party opt to choose survival over engagement. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO